



UnionYes

San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council

Council President Sherri Lightner
San Diego City Council
202 C St.
San Diego, CA 92101

February 9, 2015

Dear Council President Lightner:

As unions representing workers who reside in and/or work for the City of San Diego, we have a deep interest in advancing measures that will result in the most effective and representative City government possible. The upcoming review of the City Charter that will take place under your leadership is one such opportunity to pursue that goal through robust discussion and diverse points of view.

Accordingly, we have identified the following priority issues that we hope to see included in upcoming discussions regarding the city charter. For the sake of discussion, we have identified relevant sections of the current Charter; however, additional charter provisions may be applicable.

Thank you for your consideration of our requests. We would be happy to meet with you to further discuss these priorities should you find that helpful.

November Runoffs for all City Elections: In order to ensure that election outcomes reflect the views of as many San Diegans as possible, we urge your committee to discuss changing the candidate election process so that the two candidates who receive the highest number of votes in June primary elections automatically proceed to a November runoff. This system is currently used for state legislative offices in California and for local school board elections such as those in the San Diego Unified School District, so this proposal has the further advantage of moving voting processes in our county more uniform and predictable for voters. (Article III, s. 10)

Special Elections and Ballot Measures:

November Vote for Ballot Measures: Again, in the spirit of maximizing civic engagement, we ask the committee to propose placing referenda on November ballots only, as is now the case with state ballot measures. (Article III, s. 23)

Improving Voter Engagement in Special Elections: Special elections are usually characterized by low voter engagement, regardless of the importance of the issue to be decided. Consequently, we request that charter provisions pertaining to special elections be reviewed with an eye for avoiding costly, low turnout special elections. Ideas for discussion include expanding the time period during which a Council vacancy can be filled through Council appointment from the current "one year or less" remaining on the term of office of the vacant seat to "two years or less," unless there is a general election scheduled within one year of the vacancy. (Article III, s. 12)

Reforming the Referendum Process: In addition, we urge the committee to consider reforming the City's referendum process in order to ensure its integrity and transparency. Specific areas for discussion should include improving the timeliness of disclosure of referendum campaign funders, review of the signature gathering process, and improving the transparency of the signature verification process. (Article III, s. 23)

District Election on Community Plan Update Referenda: District elections were adopted in San Diego in the 1980's in order to ensure that no community could be silenced at the ballot box through a citywide vote. Unfortunately, that is exactly what happened this past year when the Barrio Logan Community Plan Update, a product of a five year long process involving stakeholders in Council District 8, was overturned through a citywide vote. We urge the Charter Review Committee to consider limiting referendum votes on community plans to the Council District(s) in which the community is located. (Article III, s. 23)

Authority of the City Auditor: The City Charter has been interpreted to limit the City Auditor's ability to monitor income and expenditures of external entities that are required to remit funds to the City through mechanisms such as the Transient Occupancy Tax, franchise fees, and leases. While the City Treasurer is charged with collecting these funds, additional independent audit authority will best ensure that the City is receiving the funds to which it is entitled. We request that this language be clarified to ensure transparency and accountability by including these entities in the Independent Auditor's area of audit authority. (Article V, s. 39.2)

Again, thank you for your leadership in strengthening our city's governing documents. We look forward to continued participation in this process.

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Frank Pitarro
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RB:dkb